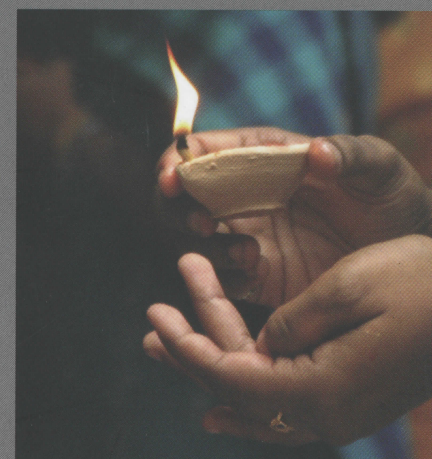
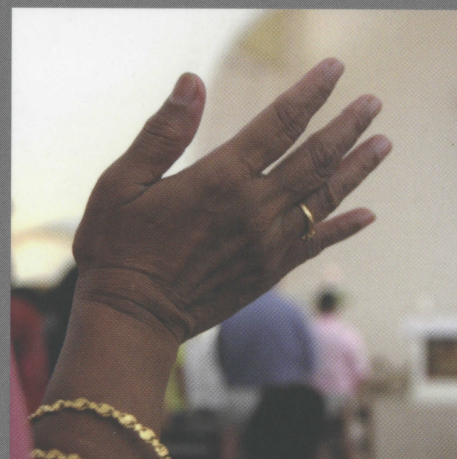


A GIVEN PATH



Harmonious Spiritual Practices in Malaysia

NAFISE E. MOTLAQ

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2/12/2025
TOM
Gift

Dear Tun Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad

I like you and your country so much
and wish you all the best

with Regards

Nafis E. Motlaq

Malaysia - Sep. 2010

A Given Path

Harmonious Spiritual Practices in Malaysia

by

Nafise E. Motlaq



PUSTAKA PERDANA



1014060

RainTree



*To my beloved Alireza, who enlightens my life with his
love, wisdom and knowledge.*

© Nafise E Motlaq, 2010

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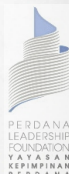
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Foreword

Given our more obvious multicultural mix in Malaysia, it is a wonder that our founding fathers didn't adopt a similar motto as Indonesia's, which is *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Trying to build a modern nation state from a population made up of so many different peoples, with different origins and histories has after all been the basis of the project of Malaysian nation building.

In recent years, attempts to build unity have meant pointing out superficial differences and melding them into some hybrid (some would say mongrel) whole. As well-intentioned as this might be, it comes off as artificial and forced and obliterates the beauty of the diversity. In our bid to promote unity, we have forgotten that diversity is not a vice but a virtue, that our understanding and respect for such diversity is in fact what builds unity.

Nafise Motlaq has the benefit of having the eyes of an outsider, able to see what we Malaysians have taken for granted for so long that we don't see what is before our eyes anymore. She saw that amongst the diversity of our peoples, there are commonalities that underscore the humanity in us all. All human beings celebrate the passage of life, with ceremonies to commemorate important markers in our lives, from birth all the way to death. These are the events that are important to all human beings, regardless of their race or religion.

The commemoration of these events may be different but the sentiments are the same. The safe birth of a child is to be thanked with prayers and parties, each passing year is celebrated with gratitude, marriages are joyous occasions and deaths are sad. These are all part of life the world over and no less in Malaysia.

What Nafise has shown through her photographs is that while politicians may want to delineate our differences, the people they are elected to serve have much in common. The ceremonies may be different but the sentiments are the same. If only our leaders stressed those commonalities more.

This book has not been an easy project to undertake because so many of us are fearful of controversy. Yet in these photographs lies the antidote to our fears, in Nafise's beautiful views of Malaysians living their cultural traditions.

I hope all Malaysians will welcome this book.

Thank you.

Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir
2010

Preface

When I first arrived in Malaysia in 2005, the number of different races and the different religions practised were the first things that attracted my attention.

I used to walk in crowded areas like Kota Raya and Pasar Seni, looking at the places of worship of different religions that face each other in the same street. I liked watching different devotees practising their own rituals and I enjoyed participating in our neighbors' different religious festivals and ceremonies. In Malaysia you can walk in a street and visit churches and temples while the sound of Azan can be heard from a nearby mosque.

I found color and light so magnificent in these places. As I was capturing the emotional moments experienced by devotees, the idea for this collection was sparked in my mind. I read and studied the ceremonies, rituals and philosophies of the four major religions practised in Malaysia in order to document the journey from birth to death, using my camera.

I enjoyed finding the similarities in different rituals and their backgrounds. I tried to observe people without being biased towards or against their beliefs, because fairness is the most important principle in documentary photography.

I endeavored to capture specific moments of each ceremony, selecting my best shots. I employed color and light as much as I could to project the atmosphere of the worship area. Each religion has a long history to tell and I can't cover all the details; some photographers work on a single religion all their lives.

So, this collection is a very short review of the most important ceremonies of four major religions practised in Malaysia. I have tried my best to make this book evidence for the idea that the more we know about each other, the more we can accept and respect our differences.

The collection is divided into four main chapters: Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism. I chose each religion based on the number of devotees in the country. The photographs are arranged to let readers follow the life's journey of the devotees and to show the role of religion from birth to death.

These photographs wouldn't have been taken without the help and understanding of Malaysians I've met. I was guided by strangers who cared and who willingly gave directions for each step. They let me be an observer in their sorrows and happiness. They accepted me and my camera into their homes and into their personal spiritual moments. I am very thankful; I will never forget their hospitality and generosity. My special thanks go to Nur Akmar Nurdin who supported me all the way from the beginning of the book's idea to editing the first draft. While I have endeavored to ensure accuracy of facts, any errors remain mine alone.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, husband, family and friends who supported and encouraged me to complete this project. I wish this book to be honest evidence of the multiracial harmony and religious tolerance in Malaysia.

Nafise Motlaq
Kuala Lumpur, 2010

Islam

Muslims regard the Qur'an as their holy book and Prophet Muhammad's words and deeds as the fundamental sources of Islam. Islam came to Malaysia in the 12th century and adapted peacefully. Islam is the official religion of the country and more than 60.4 percent of the total population are Muslims.

Unity is important within a Muslim community and this is clearly demonstrated in the rituals and cultural activities of Muslims.

Whether it was Friday prayers, mass circumcision or even a wedding that I documented, there was always an obvious sense of unity, harmony and patience.





Birth

My heart jumped a beat when I was invited to a traditional Malay baby shower ceremony known in the Malay language as *Cukur Jambul* or hair-cutting ceremony. It was a very colorful ceremony. The infant was dressed in new clothes and placed next to a decorated swing made out of Malay batik cloth. The guests, mostly women, were relatives or close family friends and they were all dressed in their fine traditional Malay dress or *baju kurongs*.

▷ A new born baby asleep at the religious ceremony called *Cukur Jambul*.

△ The women gather round the baby and the ceremony starts with a *Marhaban* – praising the Prophet Mohammad in songs.



In *A Given Path*, photojournalist Nafise Motlaq has captured the rituals that mark the key milestones in our lives. With her camera, she has painstakingly recorded the details, religious significance and cultural diversity of Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and Hindus in the rituals they practice. More than 100 photographs with captions reveal the distinctive practices as well as the striking similarities that mark a human being's sojourn on earth, no matter what our personal beliefs may be. This book is an introduction to some common religious practices and is a visual delight.

"Nafise Motlaq has the benefit of having the eyes of an outsider, able to see what we Malaysians have taken for granted for so long... She saw that amongst the diversity of our peoples, there are commonalities that underscore the humanity in us all. All human beings celebrate the passage of life, with ceremonies to commemorate important markers in our lives, from birth all the way to death. These are the events that are important to all ..."

from the Foreword By Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir



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